



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
JERRY PETROWSKI
86TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

November 17, 2009

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Testimony on behalf of Representative Jerry Petrowski
Before the Assembly Committee on Urban and Local Affairs
Regarding Assembly Bill 446

Madame Chair, members of the committee, thank you for taking the time to address AB 446 this afternoon. My name is Tim Fiocchi and I am an aid to Representative Petrowski. Representative Petrowski is sorry he could not be here today, but he needed to attend to a family matter.

AB 446 was drafted at the request of the Marathon County Treasurer and has the support of the Wisconsin County Treasurers' Association.

Current law requires county treasurers to publish a class 3 notice in the newspaper containing the names and last known addresses of owners of unclaimed funds. If there are a large number of unclaimed funds owners, the cost of publishing these notices can be burdensome to the county.

This bill would allow the treasurers to publish these detailed notices on the county's website rather than in the newspaper. The treasurer would then simply publish a general notice in the newspaper informing the public that the detailed list is available on the county website or at the treasurer's office. We believe this will save time and money for the county.

We also believe this would be a more effective way of notifying owners of unclaimed funds. In addition to the general notice being published in the newspaper, the detailed list would be available on-line on a continual basis.

Again, thank you for taking the time to hear this bill today. I would be happy to answer any questions.



PETER D. FOX
WNA Executive Director
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WNA Executive Director
PETER D. FOX

November 17, 2009

Representative Terese Berceau, Chair
Assembly Committee on Urban and Local Affairs
208 North, State Capitol
PO Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Representative Berceau and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on 2009 Assembly Bill 446 which would allow county treasurers to provide notice of unclaimed funds by using the Internet. The Wisconsin Newspaper Association strongly opposes this measure because of the inconsistencies it would create in public policy and public awareness.

Chapter 59.66 of the Wisconsin Statutes is one of many dozens of requirements that local government provide – and we stress the word “provide” – notice to citizens of government activities and processes. We note it is the basic responsibility of those governments to make that information available – in other words, it is the basic responsibility of government to disseminate that information to the public. AB 446 would shift that responsibility to citizens who then would be required to search out information for themselves on their own time. AB 446 also neglects the fact that great numbers of Wisconsin residents lack the high-speed Internet access necessary for such searches.

The intent of AB 446 is to shift the public-notice information from a consistent, reliable and familiar medium familiar to a majority of citizens to a platform a local government office finds convenient only to it. It is an established fact that newspaper readership is particularly efficient in identifying persons who are rightful owners of unclaimed property. For example, while the State Treasurer's Office does maintain an Internet posting of unclaimed property, it is the periodic newspaper listings as required by state law that draws the single greatest notice and response for that program.

Should county treasurers wish to create an Internet posting of unclaimed funds they are already permitted to do so under current law. However, substituting a Web site posting for full and proper public notice as required under current state law would defeat the purpose of the widest possible dissemination of public notice.

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There are dozens of public notice requirements in state statutes that are applicable at every level of local government. Despite the wide variety of requirements, there is consistency throughout the statutes that proper notice is given to the public in a proven, reliable, predictable and easily assessable format which meets statutory requirements for verification of publication. AB 446 would replace a well-known, understood and proven process for an approach likely to be unreliable and inconsistent.

We urge the committee to reject AB 446.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter D. Fox", with a stylized, cursive script.

Peter D. Fox
Executive Director

cc: WNA Board of Directors